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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000389

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SUBJECT: BEMBA WEAPONS CACHE SEIZED IN EQUATEUR

REF: KINSHASA 375

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) Summary: MONUC and Congolese military (FARDC) officials have seized an estimated 200 tons of weapons and ammunition belonging to the forces of Jean-Pierre Bemba in Equateur province. The cache, located in an abandoned soft drink factory in Gbadolite, near the border with the CAR, contained automatic rifles, machine guns, anti-aircraft artillery, and rocket launchers, as well as ammunition, grenades, bombs, and mortars. MONUC officials expect to find more weapons at Bemba-controlled depots in Gbadolite and Gemena. A first load of seized weapons has been transported to Kinshasa for storage and eventual destruction. End summary.

¶2. (C) MONUC and FARDC officials seized March 26 in Equateur province an arms cache belonging to the private armed forces of former Vice President Bemba. They made the seizure following the decision by Bemba's forces in Gbadolite to integrate into the FARDC and hand over their weapons in the wake of the defeat of Bemba's guard force in Kinshasa March 22-23 (reftel). MONUC officials reported approximately 225 of Bemba's men in the border town of Gbadolite chose to integrate and handed over 677 weapons to military authorities.

¶3. (C) Following their decision to integrate into the FARDC, Bemba's guard forces in Gbadolite led military investigators to an abandoned Coca-Cola factory, long reported to be a major arms depot. Officials found an estimated 200 tons of arms and ammunition, including numerous heavy weapons in apparently serviceable condition. An inventory of the material seized, provided by MONUC, includes the following:

- 424 AK-47 rifles;
- 114 light and heavy machine guns;
- 56 assault and automatic rifles;
- 48 M16 rifles;
- 45 canons of various sizes;
- 6 anti-tank weapons;
- 2 anti-aircraft guns;
- 1,279 cases of various rounds, ranging in size from 7.62mm to 23mm;
- 307 cases of various rockets, ranging in size from 83mm to 107mm;
- 6,427 bombs, ranging in size from 60mm to 120mm;
- 20 missile systems; and
- 3 ground-to-air missile systems.

¶4. (C) Johan Peleman of MONUC's Joint Mission Analysis Cell (JMAC) in Kinshasa, whose office has been monitoring the weapons seizure, told us April 3 the cache in Gbadolite is likely just the first of such discoveries. He said there are

at least two other suspected weapons caches in Gbadolite, and investigators are just beginning their work further south in Gemena.

¶15. (C) Peleman said an initial survey of the Gbadolite seizure does not show the weapons were manufactured recently. He said it appears most of the arms were delivered in 2000-2001. Peleman said he suspected international arms dealer and Russian businessman Viktor Bout sold Bemba the weapons during the DRC,s civil war.

¶16. (C) Post has obtained several photos of the arms cache. Most of the munitions were covered in dust, and many were stacked haphazardly throughout the factory. One photo showed dozens of small bombs piled on top of one another along the floor and in plastic soda crates. Several photos showed weapons and cases with foreign markings, including lettering in Arabic, Chinese, and Cyrillic. Several boxes of ammunition were labeled "Ministry of Defense Uganda," and indicated the shipments had transited Dar Es Salaam. Other boxes indicated they had been shipped from Libya and at least one bore an Iranian republic seal.

¶17. (C) The FARDC has begun transporting some of these weapons to Kinshasa for storage and eventual destruction. A chartered 727 jet left Gbadolite April 2 with approximately 16 tons of material, including more than a dozen rocket launchers and some 13 tons of 107mm rockets. Peleman said MONUC would help the FARDC identify a secure location to store the weapons in Kinshasa. No date has been set for their destruction.

¶18. (C) Comment: The discovery of the weapons cache does not come as a surprise, as its existence has been an open secret

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for years. The photographic evidence of these arms, however, and the large quantities recovered, calls into question any notion that Bemba sought to play the part of peaceful political opposition leader during a Kabila-led government. It will also be worth monitoring whatever emerges from serial number and other investigative steps in terms of timing, manufacture and shipment details of the arms and munitions. End comment.  
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